

Brooklyn's Foro Marble Company Sets Example for Post-911 Recovery

New York, NY- Nothing defines America more than its perseverance, particularly when it comes to its culture of entrepreneurship, and which is typified by Brooklyn's Foro Marble Company, Inc. Racked by the economic conditions immediately following 9/11, Foro has since become a shining example of what determination can do to not only keep a company afloat, but make it thrive.

Starting in a Brooklyn neighbor's backyard 38 years ago and eventually expanding in 1982 to a showroom in the prestigious New York Design Center, Foro designs and fabricates custom tabletops, mantles, counters, floors and furniture from imported marble, granite limestone, slate and travertine. Known for its old-world craftsmanship, Foro's impressive client list includes the likes of Time Warner, NBC, Citicorp, Alcoa and a huge number of private residences. Products are manufactured used state-of-the-art, water-jet technology and computerized milling machines.

According to company founder and president, Joe Guido, clients began deferring and canceling orders, including a major installation at the New York Stock Exchange, immediately following 9/11. Sales decreased 30% and accounts receivable slowed, leaving Foro in a precarious position-- facing bankruptcy. But Guido was not about to let the events of that day put his company under and throw 22 employees out on the street. He hadn't grown his company for 38 years and been a successful entrepreneur to see it all evaporate that easily.

Instead, Guido went on a mission to find working capital to keep the business afloat until things got better. He found that assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration and its disaster loan program which allowed him to secure \$140,000 at a low interest rate in 2002. The loan was subsequently increased to \$239,000 in July of 2003. Guido knew to approach the SBA as he had previously secured and paid off two conventional SBA loans to grow Foro. Guido also sought out and received assistance from the small business development center at Baruch College. The SBDC is funded in part by the SBA.

Guido makes it a point of staying abreast of business trends, economic conditions and incentives. When he learned of the 2003 Tax Relief Package, which increased equipment expensing four-fold, from \$25,000 to \$100,000, he was quick to take advantage. He purchased a new \$50,000 milling machine that could not have otherwise afforded. The new machine not only helped Guido bid on and land a contract with Pfizer Chemical, but also hire a new employee. In his efforts to help other small businesses prosper, Guido recently hosted a forum at his facility, inviting SBA officials and the media to help spread the word concerning the benefits of new tax provisions that benefited Foro.

Guido's determination to see things through has led to numerous awards and recognition. He was a recipient of the SBA's Phoenix Award in 2002 and was highlighted in an SBA disaster-relief video designed to help other small businesses. He was featured on CNN/fn

and also caught the attention of American Express, with the company shooting a commercial for its “Open Network” at Foro’s plant in Park Slope, Brooklyn. Business is good now for Foro with business up a healthy 7 percent for 2003 and employing 25 people. According to Guido, “We are most fortunate to be experiencing an economic time when there is renewed confidence in the growth and commitment of New York as a viable place to grow small businesses.” “There is a breath of fresh air and enthusiasm in every aspect of business here,” he adds.

Guido also offers a little advice to his fellow small business owners. He says, “Work very hard, keep your expenses down, and be honest and fair with everyone.” Take it from a survivor.